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ABU DHABI FOR WECHSEL/ HOPKINS, LONDON FOR TSOU

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER SPEAKS OUT ON WOMEN,  
PARTIES

1. SUMMARY: Speaker of the National Assembly Jassem Al-Khorafi discussed women's political rights, human rights, Kuwait's democratic development and political parties in a July 19 interview with Abu Dhabi TV widely covered the next day in all local media. Al-Khorafi clarified a series of recent public statements, and claimed that Kuwaiti democratic development was still "incomplete." END SUMMARY.

2. Much of the interview, which was extensively transcribed in all local Arabic dailies, involved the interviewer confronting Al-Khorafi with his own statements of the previous two months, and those of others, and asking the Speaker for further comment. On women's rights, Al-Khorafi was asked to comment on statements by some women's activists that women should be given a quota of elected offices. Al-Khorafi cryptically responded that "women must be wise on how to use their rights."

3. Al-Khorafi was less cryptic in denying allegations that the Government granted women their political rights only after bowing to international pressure. "No," Al-Khorafi responded. "[Kuwait] made the decision, and we made it because it was the right time."

4. The time has not yet come for the legalization of political parties, Al-Khorafi said, reiterating remarks he made in a July 3 meeting with the editors-in-chief of Kuwaiti Arabic dailies. At that time, Al-Khorafi reportedly said that democracy cannot continue without the legalization of parties. He said that now was not the time, but that the time would come soon. Al-Khorafi said virtually the same thing to Abu Dhabi TV, remarking that Kuwait's democracy is "incomplete" without legal parties, but "at the moment we are not in favor of" the legalization.

5. Al-Khorafi was also asked about statements he made on June 26, strongly criticizing the Government's failure to respond to both the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which ranked Kuwait Tier 3, and inaccurate media reports that Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Cheney had called for international monitoring of Kuwait's 2007 elections. The Speaker, whose forceful comments at that time spurred a flurry of media speculation on why he was discussing the U.S. in such harsh terms, told Abu Dhabi TV that, "at that time, I said what had to be said. It is over."

6. In yet another series of widely-discussed remarks the Speaker made regarding the TIP report in the wake of its issuance in June, he said, referring to the U.S. having issued the report, "that those in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." Referring to those statements, the Abu Dhabi interviewer asked, "Were those the statements of Kuwait or of Al-Khorafi?" "Al-Khorafi the Kuwaiti," was the Speaker's answer. He further added that while no country is perfect, Kuwait remains open to constructive criticism about its human rights record.

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